After-Action Review: A Tool for Continuous Improvement in Agricultural Development.

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Abstract
Is it academic independence or arrogance? Is it consultant competition or a lack of trust and sharing? Why don’t we learn from our experiences and why don’t we share our collective lessons-learned and best practices with our team? Rather—in an over-scheduled calendar—we often subscribe to the catchphrase, “… never time to do it right but always time to do it over.”

Reflection is a powerful tool, however it has no value if it is not systematic, shared, and integrated into a course of action. Today’s international agricultural development environment—particularly post-conflict development—requires discipline, ongoing attention, collective action, and learning through experience. After-action review (AAR) is a structured tool that will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of a team and return a huge return on investment (ROI).

Our collective purpose in a rapidly changing world is to improve our effectiveness and efficiency in agricultural development. AAR is a powerful tool. This poster focuses on seven pragmatic steps that improve planning, preparing, conducting and using the results of the AAR. The result is to move one step closer to becoming a learning organization (Senge et al., 1999).

This poster reports grounded experience by Team Borlaug (TB) from May through December 2008 in four provinces in Iraq. TB is comprised of 12 agricultural and veterinary scientists and specialists intentionally providing the best science and technology solutions for agricultural development for the commanders of the Multinational Division Central in Iraq. TB adopted AAR as a tool to systematically discuss an event, focus on performance standards, share what had happened and why it happened, and to learn how to get maximum benefit from the experience. The AAR was an integrative step in reporting accurate observations, identifying potential strategies and recommending alternative courses of action.

After a transitional period, the AAR occurred at the closure of every day with a 30-45 minute focused team dialogue around performance issues of “sustain, improve, and tomorrow mission.” The AAR included all players in the event—TB members, provincial reconstruction team (PRT and ePRT) members, and the military commanding officer and NCO. This poster will describe the AAR event and demonstrate key steps in planning, preparing, conducting and using the results of the AAR as a continuous improvement tool.
Success is measured by people’s ability to name a performance target and hit it, regardless of what situations they encounter. This poster identifies actions that led to success in a variety of agricultural development environments in Iraq with implications for other developing countries.

Specific recommendations are included. AARs identify how to correct deficiencies, sustain strengths, and focus on performance and result. Agricultural development professionals must respond to the challenge. As a tool, AAR will improve our effectiveness and efficiency as we work in a hot, flat and crowded world. A list of references is provided with the poster abstract.

**Key words:** (5) after-action review; continuous improvement; integration; learning organization; teamwork